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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement presented by Madre, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Statement

1. Far from bringing security, prosperity and freedom as promised by George W. Bush, the US occupation of Iraq has fomented a human rights crisis for Iraqi women and families. US policy in Iraq violates international law and directly contradicts the letter and spirit of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals.

Freedom from Violence

2. Iraqi women cite ongoing warfare and a breakdown in security and public order as the number one problem in Iraq since the invasion. Between March 2003 and October 2004, US-led forces killed more than 100,000 Iraqis.[1] In November 2004, the US initiated a major assault on the city of Fallujah in which US soldiers displayed a disregard bordering on contempt for the lives of Iraqi civilians.

3. Social disintegration and political turmoil triggered by the overthrow of the Iraqi government has brought a sharp rise in gender-based violence, including abduction, rape and "honor killings". Girls are being kept out of school. In many areas, Islamic militants now patrol the streets, beating and harassing women who are not "properly" dressed or behaved. US occupation authorities bear direct responsibility for the rise of religious extremists. In July 2003, US Coalition Provisional Authority Chief Paul Bremer personally appointed reactionary Muslim clerics to the Iraqi Governing Council, knowingly empowering leaders with a stated commitment to restricting women's human rights.

4. US occupation authorities have failed to meet their legal obligations under the Hague Convention and the Forth Geneva Convention to provide security to Iraqi civilians.[2] US attacks on Iraqi civilians and US military treatment of Iraqi prisoners have systematically violated the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Geneva Conventions, and the UN Convention Against Torture.

The Right to Economic Security

5. The Bush Administration is transforming Iraq's centralized economy into a neo-liberal "free market" system.[3] Policies being implemented by the US, including the discredited Structural Adjustment Programs of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund; vast privatization of public services; and a trade regime heavily skewed to benefit US-based corporations, are widely acknowledged to increase poverty and inequality and undermine public health, sustainable development, workers' rights, education and political participation.

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[1] Les Roberts, et al. "Mortality before and after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: cluster sample survey," *The Lancet*, October 29, 2004 (http://image.thelancet.com/extras/04art10342web.pdf).

[2] Article 43 of the Hague Convention (IV) respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land obliges the occupying power to restore and maintain public order and safety; and Articles 29 and 47 of the Forth Geneva Convention oblige occupation authorities to respect the fundamental human rights of the inhabitants of the occupied territory.

[3] Antonia Juhasz, "Ambitions of Empire: The Bush Administration Economic Plan for Iraq," *LeftTurn Magazine*, Occupation Watch, January 20, 2004.

6. Iraqi women will bear the brunt of the extreme privatization being imposed by the US. Like women everywhere, Iraqi women are the majority of the poor who stand to lose access to critical social services in a "free-market" Iraq. As society's primary caretakers, Iraqi women will be forced to absorb the burden created by the elimination of public health care, education, housing, food subsidies, water services and other programs designed to meet the basic needs of the population.

7. International law, as outlined in the Hague Convention and the Hague Regulations, as well as the US Army's own Law of Land Warfare, make it illegal for the CPA to impose these fundamental changes on Iraq's economy.[4]

8. US policy in Iraq severely undermines the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, including commitments to prevent and eliminate violence against women; promote sustainable development, which rests on a guarantee of women's human rights and the full and equal participation of women in development and decision-making processes; and the eradication of the "persistent and increasing burden of poverty of women" exacerbated by economic reforms such as SAPs and privatization. In fomenting human rights crises for women and families in Iraq and enabling a corporate takeover of Iraqi industries, the US occupation imposes a stiff barrier towards the achievement of each of the Millennium Development Goals.[5]

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[4] US economic policy in Iraq violates the Hague Convention and its annexed Regulations respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land (Hague Regulations) of 18 October 1907. The Hague Regulations state that an occupying power must respect "unless absolutely prevented, the laws in force in the country." In September 2003, Bremer signed orders which called for the privatization of at least 200 Iraqi state companies, allowed for foreign investors to retain 100 percent ownership of Iraqi banks, mines and factories, and permitted foreign investors to pocket all of their profits without reinvesting in the reconstruction of Iraq. These measures directly contradict the Iraqi constitution which outlaws the privatization of key state assets and bars foreigners from owning Iraqi firms. Moreover, the US Army's Law of Land Warfare states that the occupying force "does not have the right of sale or unqualified use of [non-military] property."

[5] Namely: the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger (Goal 1); the achievement of universal primary education for boys and girls (Goal 2); the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women (Goal 3); and a commitment to sustainable development (Goals 7 & 8).